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A BRIEF ACCOUNT

OF

JOHN MILTON

AND HIS

*DECLARATION
OF INDEPENDENCE*

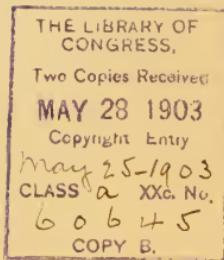
WORCESTER, MASS.

1903

A BRIEF ACCOUNT
OF
JOHN MILTON
—
AND HIS
Alfred W. Pitkin
DECLARATION
OF INDEPENDENCE

PRESS OF
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WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS
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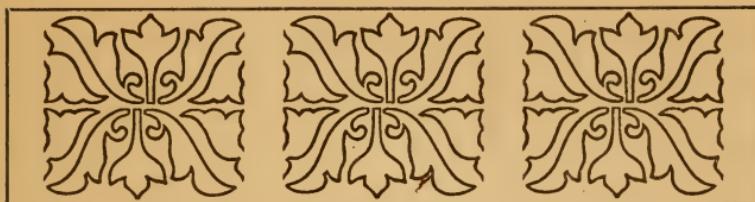
No.

What I have termed Milton's Declaration of Independence, was written soon after the execution of Charles I., 1649.

To facilitate comparison, it is printed in the following pages opposite portions of The Declaration of Independence by Jefferson and will probably impress the reader by the similarity of ideas and the sequence of thought.

The extracts from Milton's Prose Works are taken from the first collective edition, published in three volumes folio, Amsterdam, (London), 1698.

A. W.



JOHN MILTON

The grandfather of John Milton was a substantial yeoman who lived at Stanton St. John, about five miles from Oxford, where his son, the father of the poet, is said to have been a chorister and to have conformed to the Anglican Church for which he was disinherited by his father who adhered to the Roman Catholic faith.

Banished from his home, the son went to London where, by the assistance of a friend, he engaged in business as a scrivener, a profession which included several duties now performed by a lawyer. He undertook the management of property, invested savings, collected rents and was known as a prudent, successful and honorable man. He was of liberal education, a fine musician, and many of his musical compositions may be found among the best collections of that time. He lived over his place of business, which bore the sign of The Spread Eagle, the family crest, and was situated in Bread street, Cheapside. In that house, on the ninth of December, 1608, John Milton was born.

The boy was blessed in his parents and cherished their memory with delightful tenderness. His thoughts of his mother were sanctified by her graceful charities; his

father's solicitude for his well-being and education was the constant theme of gratitude. He was sent to St. Paul's school; the instruction received there was supplemented by a private tutor at home whose careful training was always eagerly acknowledged. His desire for learning was impetuous; he studied with such earnestness that from his twelfth year he seldom left his books before midnight.

He was admitted to Christ's College, Cambridge, Feb. 12, 1625. His fellow students soon discovered what manner of youth he was. The name which they gave him, "The Lady of Christ's," testified quite as much to the purity of his thought and conversation as to his classic features and dignified bearing.

In 1632, Milton proceeded to his M. A. degree and left college with a firm resolution to adopt neither the profession of the church nor that of the law.

He now retired for a time to his father's country residence in the village of Horton, about 17 miles from London, something suspicious of himself as he marks the rapid flight of time:—

" How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,
Stol'n on his wing my three and twentieth year!
My hastening days fly on with full career,
But my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th,
Perhaps, my semblance might deceive the truth,
That I to manhood am arrived so near,
And inward ripeness doth much less appear,
That some more timely-happy spirits endu'th.
Yet be it less or more, or soon or slow,
It shall be still in strictest measure even
To that same lot, however mean or high,
Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heaven,
All is, if I have grace to use it so,
As ever in my great Taskmaster's eye."

Yet, his persevering industry had rewarded him with a rare knowledge of Greek, Hebrew, with its two dialects, Latin, French, Italian and Spanish, and a wide acquaintance with the best literature. He knew that in him lay the seeds of genius and he nurtured them with ceaseless care. His desire was to give the world a work which it should not willingly let die ; he tells us how he prepared for it :

“ He who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem; that is a composition and pattern of the best and honorablest things.” *

Again :

“ Neither do I think it shame to covenant with any knowing reader, that for some few years yet I may go on trust with him toward the payment of what I am now indebted, as being a work not to be raised from the heat of youth, or the vapors of wine ; like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amorist, or the trencher fury of a rhyming parasite ; nor to be obtained by the invocation of Dame Memory and her siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that eternal Spirit, who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his Seraphim, with the hallow’d fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases.” †

The popular idea of Milton is, I think, that of a Puritan poet; stiff-starched, proud and precise; an austere

**An Apology for Smectymnuus.* I. 177.

†*The Reason of Church Government.* I. 223.

man dwelling in a region of perpetual frown; selfishly religious, detesting laughter, forbidding pleasure; his features relaxing only, when he grimly thought of the ultimate destination of the vast majority of his fellow creatures.

The poet was, however, almost the reverse of this. Until he had reached middle life he was one of the happiest of human beings. His father's love and admiration of him was boundless. He possessed a moderate share of fortune, good health, maintained by temperance and exercise. He was fond of conversation, excelled in manly sports, was an admirable swordsman and a thorough musician. He encouraged harmless gaiety, approved of dancing, took part in village pastimes and in courtly masques; gave concerts and visited theatres. He was a student "beholding the bright countenance of truth in the quiet and still air of delightful studies," "a poet soaring in the high region of his fancies with his garland and singing robes about him."

We should study *L'Allegro* if we would know Milton in his early manhood. That poem illustrates the buoyant spirit, the eager nature and beneficent genius to which deep sorrow and harsh trial, were, as yet, strangers. I have known good people to be a little startled on learning that Milton wrote this verse:—

" Sport, that wrinkled care derides,
And laughter holding both his sides,
Come and trip it as you go,
On the light fantastic toe."

To the lovers of the poet, *L'Allegro* is a source of perpetual delight—a well spring of happiness bubbling with innocent merriment and unreproved joy.

I love to think of him at Horton in those bright summer days when he wrote the *Masque of Comus*. He was wont to rise with the birds, to join in their chorus of praise as the dawn flung back the curtains of the night and spread the sky robes spun from Iris' woof upon the throne of day. The early morning air refreshing and invigorating all; the dewdrops pendent from the bladed grass like diamonds glittering in the light of the rising sun. There he stands upon a verdant slope. He is clad in the picturesque costume of the time; beautiful as Apollo, with something more than human grace in form and feature. His light-brown hair falling in luxuriant locks upon his shoulders; a roseate tint upon his cheeks; the eyes, as yet, undimmed, clear and serene as the heaven above him, while sweetest thoughts give welcome to his pure summons as he sings :—

“ Mortals, that would follow me,
Love Virtue, she alone is free.
She can teach ye how to climb
Higher than the sphery chime;
Or, if Virtue feeble were,
Heav’n itself would stoop to her.”

In 1638, Milton was provided by his indulgent father with the means for travelling upon the continent, and for more than 15 months journeyed from place to place, most of his time being passed in Italy. He was much praised by the learned there for the ease and grace of his Latin verse, he tells us with amused pride that he read to them the compositions of his college days, but we should remember that those were worthy of him and that he thought so is apparent from the fact that he had carefully prefixed the dates on which they were originally written.

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In Italy he visited Galileo, who was then suffering imprisonment for thinking on matters of astronomy other than the Dominican and Franciscan fathers thought. It was dangerous to give free expression to ideas such as his in the country of the Inquisition, and though he was fearless, many of his friends there were not, and told him they were deterred by his free speech, from offering the attention which he merited. He did not obtrude his opinions upon religious matters, but when he was questioned upon them he replied with a consistent and immaculate independence.

Milton returned to England in August, 1639. He took lodgings for a time in Fleet street, London, and soon afterwards rented a house in Aldersgate Street where he kept a private school and taught the sons of relatives and friends.

At this time many good people in England had been disturbed by the despotic government of James and Charles I. That we may better understand Milton's course, it is necessary briefly to digress.

When the Anglican Church, of which the Pope had been the recognized superior, turned from Roman Catholicism and made the King arbiter in matters theological, the interests of the King became identified with those of a majority of the English clergy; their offices, emoluments and worldly prosperity became interwoven with his; thus he could rely upon their assistance and an immense accession of strength accrued to him. There is no question that, in England, the Reformation in its early stages was adverse to national prosperity. The clergy, under the King, were less tolerant and beneficial than they had been under the Pope.

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Elizabeth, the last of the Tudors, clearly foresaw the advent of national will, as expressed through Parliament, and in critical moments bowed before it with infinite tact.

When the fated Stewarts tried to rule England they neither knew how to select their advisers nor how to preserve the affection of the people. The exercise of their intellects was limited to their own aggrandizement. Thus, James I., on coming to England, enquired : “Do I mak’ the judges ? Do I mak’ the bishops ?” being assured, he said : “Then by God’s wauns, I mak’ what likes me law and gospel.”

This inherited determination occasioned the Puritan Revolution. It was not possible that the awakening of the human mind which followed the invention of printing and which was magnificently illustrated during the reign of Elizabeth, could content itself with mere literary expression. Thought, therefore, ventured to discuss every question affecting the well-being of the human race. If the Pope could be deposed rightfully, then archbishops and bishops, even kings, could be deposed also. The Brownists of Elizabeth’s time became the Independents of James and Charles. These rulers, with the Anglican clergy, endeavored to suppress nonconformity. Many of the noblest and the best of English men and women emigrated to New England to escape persecution. The ominous nature of this proceeding was clearly pointed out by Milton:—

“O, sir,” he said, “if we could but see the shape of our dear mother England, as poets are wont to give a personal form to what they please, how would she appear, think ye, but in a mourning weed, with ashes upon her head, and tears abun-

dantly flowing from her eyes, to behold so many of her children exposed at once, and thrust from things of dearest necessity, because their conscience could not assent to things which the bishops thought *indifferent*. What more binding than conscience? What more free than *indifference*? Cruel then must that indifference needs be, that shall violate the strict necessity of conscience; merciless and inhuman that free choice and liberty that shall break asunder the bonds of religion. Let the Astrologer be dismay'd at the portentous blaze of comets and impressions in the air, as foretelling troubles and changes to states. I shall believe there cannot be a more ill-boding sign to a nation than when the inhabitants, to avoid insufferable grievances at home, are enforced by heaps to forsake their native country." *

James I. died in 1625. His son, Charles I., succeeded to his throne and his policy. In 1639 an attempt was made by the King and the church to coerce the Scots, to compel them to accept episcopacy. Milton, returning from his travels, found "all mouths open against the bishops" and entered into the dispute. His appeal was like a bugle-call summoning the faithful, the rank and file of dissenting English and Scotch to combat unitedly for their rights and to crush the insolence of despotism which "would make a national war out of a surplice brabble."

"Go on, both hand in hand, O nations, never to be disunited; be the praise and the heroic

*Of Reformation. I. 266-267.

song of all posterity; merit this, but seek only virtue, not to extend your limits; for what needs? to win a fading triumphant laurel out of the tears of wretched men, but to settle the pure worship of God in his church, and justice in the state; then shall the hardest difficulties smooth out themselves before ye; envy shall sink to hell, craft and malice be confounded, whether it be home-bred mischief or outlandish cunning; yea other nations will then covet to serve ye, for Lordship and Victory are but the pages of Justice and Virtue. Commit securely to true Wisdom the vanquishing and uncasing of craft and subtlety, which are but her two runnagates; join your invincible might to do worthy and God-like deeds; and then he that seeks to break your union, a cleaving curse be his inheritance to all generations."*

So far as I have noticed, most of the editors of Milton refer to his prose works as ephemeral productions exerting little influence upon his own time and none upon ours; moreover, these editors generally regret that the poet allowed his genius to be misled by a will-o'-the-wisp into the quagmire of polemics.

I cannot quite understand this because it seems to be controverted by the living facts which prove that few men have exerted so potent an ascendancy over the minds of their fellows. If the measure of influence be the degree of success, Milton's prose works were greatly influential in England for at least, a third of a century; true, that in-

**Of Reformation.* I. 271.

fluence waned with the restoration of the Stewarts but then piety, justice and common-sense waned, too. Milton's thoughts were preserved and treasured by the Puritans and Independents, particularly by those who left the Old England for the New. They brought the seeds of his doctrines with them; here they struck deep root and flourished, ultimately to blossom in the Declaration of Independence.

In controversy, Milton displayed no hesitation, doubt or misgiving. He was no stranger to himself. He knew the fullness of his strength and reposed therein with perfect confidence. His opinions developed consistently. His ideas of theology and politics were not liable to the distortion which follows upon their illumination by a flash of enthusiasm but were gradually evolved by serious meditation in the sober light of day. Constancy, justice and fortitude were partners of his soul. No threat could daunt him and no bribe could win. He adored truth and liberty, and never, knowingly, defamed the objects of his adoration. Sincerity is evident on every page, clear, pure as the sunlight dispersing evil and ignorance. He abhorred avarice and ambition nobly exemplifying his hatred. He scorned pecuniary benefit and freely devoted his great powers to the public service:—

“Do they think then,” he said, “that all these meaner and superfluous things come from God, and the divine gift of learning from the den of Plutus, or the cave of Mammon? Certainly never any clear spirit nurst up from brighter influences, with a soul enlarged to the dimensions of spacious art and high knowledge, ever entered

there but with scorn and thought it ever foul disdain to make pelf or ambition the reward of his studies, it being the greatest honor, the greatest fruit and proficiency of learned studies to despise these things. Not liberal science, but illiberal must that needs be that mounts in contemplation merely for money.”*

There was no mistaking his purpose. He indulged in no wily fence play to deceive his enemy but with fierce energy thrust right at the heart of inhumanity, oppression and untruth.

He despised ignoble authority. He could not bear to see a good and wise man in a dungeon and a fool upon a throne. He claimed for every man the right to be free from political and spiritual tyranny. Today, he would be termed a Radical in politics and an Unitarian in religion. He possessed invincible courage, an indomitable will; a resolute common-sense which never faltered before a proposition of human or spiritual welfare. Panoplied by virtue he never shamed her armor. He fought standing on the broad principle of human rights. He was indignant at the audacity of the claim that one man’s prejudices should over-ride the reason of all the rest. From youth to age, in prosperity and in adversity, in sickness and in health, grandly consistent always. He says:—

“ It were a nation miserable indeed, not worth the name of a nation, but a race of idiots, whose happiness and welfare depended upon one man. The happiness of a nation consists in true religion, piety, justice, prudence, temperance, for-

**Animadversions, &c.* I. 161.

titude and the contempt of avarice and ambition. They in whomsoever these virtues dwell eminently, need not kings to make them happy, but are the architects of their own happiness; and whether to themselves or others are not less than kings.”*

Charles I. abhorred the thought of popular government. The people, he said, had no right beyond that of having their life and property secure. How these were to be guaranteed he did not say but Milton perceived very clearly that if the people had no share in the government they had no security for either life or property.

The causes of the Puritan Revolution were like those which actuated our own Revolution. It should surprise no one to learn that the conclusions which justified the one were asserted to sustain the other. There is scarcely a fact affirmed by Milton against the despotism of Charles I. which was not reaffirmed by Jefferson against the tyranny of George III.

That Jefferson had Milton’s Prose Works, particularly “The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates,” and “A Defense of the English People,” before him when he wrote the Declaration of Independence is uncertain. Bancroft says positively that Jefferson drew it “from the fulness of his own mind without consulting one single book,”‡ yet the likeness to Milton’s Declaration of Independence is remarkable and a comparison admirably illustrates the political genius of the great poet.

**Eikonoclastes*. II. 507.

†*A Defence of The People of England*. II. 581, 582.

‡Bancroft. *History United States*. VIII. 465. Sixth Edition, 1868.

Milton—

“No man who knows ought, can be so stupid to deny that all men naturally were born free, being the image and resemblance of God him-selfe, and were by privilege above all the creatures, borne to command and not to obey: and that they lived so, till from the root of *Adams* transgression, falling among themselves to doe wrong and violence, and foreseeing that such courses must needs tend to the destruction of them all, they agreed by common league to bind each other from mutual injury, and joyntly to defend themselves against any that gave disturbance or opposition to such agreement. Hence came Cities, Towns and Common-wealths. And because no faith in all was found sufficiently binding, they saw it needful to ordaine some Autoritie, that might restraine by force and punishment what was violated against peace and common

Jefferson—

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these, are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

That, to secure these rights, governments are

Milton—

right: This autoritie and power of self-defence and preservation being originally and naturally in every one of them, and unitedly in them all, for ease, for order; and least each man should be his owne partial judge, they communicated and deriv'd either to one, whom for the eminence of his wisdom and integritie they chose above the rest, or to more then one whom they thought of equal deserving: the first was called a King; the other Magistrates. Not to be their Lords and Maisters (though afterward those names in som places were giv'n voluntarily to such as had bin authors of inestimable good to the people) but to be thir Deputies and Commissioners, to execute, by virtue of thir intrusted power, that justice which else every man by the bond of Nature and of Cov'nant must have executed for

Jefferson—

instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed;

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Milton—

himselfe, and for one another."

* * * * *

"It follows lastly, that since the King or Magistrate holds his autoritie of the people, both originally and naturally for their good in the first place, and not his owne, then may the people as oft as they shall judge it for the best, either choose him or reject him, retaine him or depose him though no Tyrant, meerly by the libertie and right of free born men to be govern'd as seems to them best." *

"Certainly, if no people in their right wits ever committed the Government either to a King, or other Magistrates, for any other purpose than for the common good of them all, there can be no reason why, to prevent the utter ruin of them all, they

Jefferson—

that, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

*The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates. Vol. II. pp. 531, 532, 533.

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Milton--

may not as well take it back again from a King, as from other Governors; * * * * And to invest any mortal creature with a power over themselves, on any other terms than upon trust, were extreme madness; nor is it credible that any people since the Creation of the World, who had freedom of will, were ever so miserably silly, as either to part with the power for ever, and to all purposes, or to revoke it from those whom they had entrusted with it, but upon most urgent and weighty reasons. * * * * Whence it follows * * * That *Governors are not lightly to be changed*, is true with respect to the Peoples Prudence, not the King's Right."

"Nature teaches men to give way sometimes to the violence and outrages of Tyrants, the necessity of affairs sometimes enforces a Toleration with their enormities; what foundation can

Jefferson--

Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established, should not be changed for light and transient causes; and, accordingly, all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while

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Milton—

you find in this forced patience of a Nation, in this compulsory submission, to build a Right upon, for Princes to tyrannize by the Law of Nature? * * * * *

Nature teaches us, of two evils to choose the least; and to bear with oppression, as long as there is a necessity of so doing.”*

“A Tyrant whether by wrong or by right comming to the Crowne, is he who regarding neither Law nor the common good, reigns onely for himself and his Faction:

* * * * * Against whom what the people lawfully may doe, as against a common pest, and destroyer of mankinde, I suppose no man of cleare judgement need goe furder to be guided then by the very principles of nature in him.”†

Jefferson—

evils are sufferable than to right them selves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But, when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security.

* * * * *

**A Defence of The People of England.* Vol. II. pp. 623-610.

†*Tenure of Kings and Magistrates.* Vol. II. p. 535.

Milton—

“Thus farr hath bin considered briefly the power of Kings and Magistrates; how it was, and is originally the peoples, and by them conferred in trust onely to bee employed to the common peace and benefit; with libertie therefore and right remaining in them to reassume it to themselves, if by Kings or Magistrates it be abus'd; or to dispose of it by any alteration, as they shall judge most conduced to the public good.”*

“Who knows not that there is a mutual bond of amity and brotherhood between man and man over all the World, neither is it the English Sea that can sever us from that duty and relation: a straiter bond yet there is between fellow-subjects, neighbours and friends; But when any of these do one to another so as hostility could

Jefferson—

Nor have we been wanting in attention to our British brethren. We have warned them, from time to time, of attempts made by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them, by the ties of our common kindred, to disavow these usurpations, which would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They, too, have been deaf to the voice of justice and consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity,

**Tenure of Kings and Magistrates.* II. 535.

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Milton—

do no worse, what doth the Law decree less against them, then open enemies and invaders? * * * * * Nor is it distance of place that makes enmitie, but enmity that makes distance. He therefore that keeps peace with me neer or remote, of whatsoever Nation, is to me as far as all civil and human Offices an Englishman and a Neighbour, but if an Englishman forgetting al Laws, human, civil and religious, offend against life and libertie, to him offended and to the Law in his behalf, though born in the same Womb, he is no better then a Turk, a Sarasin, a Heathen.”*

Jefferson—

which denounces our separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies in war, in peace, friends.”

**Tenure of Kings and Magistrates.* Vol. II. p. 536.

The conflict between the King and the parliament was ended. Cromwell endeavored to save the King but proofs of the royal duplicity were made evident again and again. At length, disgusted with the Stewart's perfidy, he left the baffled monarch to his fate. The death warrant of Charles I. was as Horace Walpole called it, the Major Charta of English liberty.

The trial and execution of the King aroused the anger of Salmasius, at that time the greatest scholar in Europe with the single exception of Grotius. In a diatribe of exceeding bitterness, he exclaimed against the English people. Milton replied: his Defence of the English people made him known throughout the Continent. He was hailed as the Vindicator of Liberty. All Europe rang with his fame.

The attack of Salmasius was furious but it lacked argument which could commend it to other than those who flourished on despotism. It was a plea for tyranny and the perpetuation of injustice. It ignored the rights and the desires of the individual subject, considering him as a creature born to be taxed; existing politically, merely as a necessary and divinely appointed contributor to kingly power; having no inherent right to any share in government, nor with liberty to protest against its measures so long as his life and property were not endangered. This was, indeed, the argument of Charles I. himself. A brief extract from Milton's First Defence will prove with what supreme ability he answered it.

In his Preface to *A Defence of the People of England* he says:—

“Nature and Laws would be in an ill case, if Slavery should find what to say for itself, and Liberty be mute: and if Tyrants should find men to plead for them, and they that can master and vanquish Tyrants, should not be able to find advocates. And it were a deplorable thing indeed, if the reason mankind is endu'd withal, and which is the gift of God, should not furnish more arguments for men's preservation, for their deliverance, and, as much as the nature of the thing will bear, for making them equal to one another, than for their oppression, and for their utter ruin under the domineering power of one single person. Let me therefore enter upon this noble cause with a cheerfulness grounded upon this assurance, that my adversary's cause is maintained by nothing but Fraud, Fallacy, Ignorance and Barbarity; whereas mine has Light, Truth, Reason, the Practice and the Learning of the best ages of the world upon its side.”*

Vituperation is undoubtedly a blemish in controversy ; we may well regret that Milton here made such free use of it; but the weakness brings the poet a little closer to us. He convicted his antagonist of misrepresentation, deceit and untruth. No vituperation could make those facts other than hideous. It was unnecessary to call Salmasius a liar after having proved him one. It was a work of supererogation to term him “a tormentor of semi-

*A Defence of the People of England. II. 559.

colons." The castigation administered by Milton was frightful. Salmasius never recovered from it.

The warning was sufficient to hinder wise men from renewing the controversy, but an unwise man ventured to attack Milton in a volume entitled, "The Blood of the King Clamoring to Heaven." This work was attributed to Alexander Morus, who, indeed, had supervised the proof and publication and wrote the preface in which Milton was further reviled. This called forth: "The Second Defence of John Milton, Englishman, for the People of England." Salmasius had been ignominiously whipped and now Morus was flayed alive. The poor wretch begged for pity, screamed with terror and disowned the authorship. Milton was relentless and buried his victim under an accumulation of vituperative Latin.

Cromwell was now Protector and Milton Latin Secretary to the Council of State. We know not if either ever spoke to the other, but we know that the poet, with the rare independence which was his, dared to differ from the Protector's policy more than once. It would be very interesting to learn what Cromwell thought of the Secretary; we know what the Secretary thought of Cromwell.

"We were left," he says, addressing Oliver, "we were left to ourselves: the whole national interest fell into your hands, and subsists only in your abilities. To your virtue, overpowering and resistless, every man gives way, except some who, without equal qualifications, aspire to equal honors, who envy the distinctions of merit greater than their own, or who have yet to learn that in the coalition of human society, nothing is more

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pleasing to God, or more agreeable to reason, than that the highest mind should have the sovereign power. Such, Sir, are you by general confession; such are the things achieved by you, the greatest and most glorious of our countrymen, the director of our public councils, the leader of unconquered armies, the father of your country; for by such title does every good man hail you with sincere and voluntary praise.” *

Oliver’s son, Richard, succeeded him as Protector, but the master-mind was gone and public affairs drifted to confusion. Milton vainly endeavored to recall the achievements of the Commonwealth and most truly prophesied the consequences of the restoration of the Stewarts. In a little less than two years after Oliver’s death Charles II. came back in triumph.

Now, England, Milton’s dear mother England, fell from the zenith of her glory and sank to the lowest depths of degradation; but the great poet was

“ unchang’d,

* * * Though fall’n on evil days,
On evil days though fall’n and evil tongues,
In darkness, and with dangers compass’d round
And solitude—” †

To that “solitude” we are indebted for the “Paradise Lost.”

I should call attention to the fact, which seems to have escaped the general notice of book-buyers, that some editions of “Paradise Lost” do not contain a

*Johnson Lives. I. 106.

†Paradise Lost. VII. 24.

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vigorous line in the twelfth book. The editions referred to commencing with the 64th line and ending with the 70th line read as follows:

“O execrable son! so to aspire
Above his brethren, to himself assuming
Authority usurp’d, from God not giv’n,
He gave us only over beast, fish, fowl,
Dominion absolute; that right we hold
By his donation; such title to Himself
Reserving, human left from human free.”

How characteristic of Milton the line omitted is:—

“O execrable son! so to aspire
Above his brethren, to himself assuming
Authority usurp’d, from God not giv’n.
He gave us only over beast, fish, fowl,
Dominion absolute; that right we hold
By his donation; *but man over men*
He made not lord, such title to Himself
Reserving, human left from human free.”

Paradise Lost was written “to justify the ways of God to men,” to show that, eventually, iniquity shall be defeated, its utmost malice thwarted, its curse become a blessing and its evil turned to good. The arch-fiend suspects the godlike purpose.

“ * * * If then his providence
Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,
Our labor must be to pervert that end
And out of good still to find means of evil.”

“ * * * but that the will
And high permission of all-ruling heaven
Left him at large to his own dark designs;
That with reiterated crimes he might
Heap on himself damnation, while he sought
Evil to others, and enraged might see

JOHN MILTON

How all his malice served but to bring forth
Infinite goodness, grace and mercy shown
On man by him seduced."

When the archangel Michael reveals the future to Adam before expelling him from Eden, "our sire

" Replete with joy and wonder thus replied :
O goodness infinite, goodness immense !
That all this good of evil shall produce,
And evil turn to good; more wonderful
Than that which by creation first brought forth
Light out of darkness ! "

The invocation is a prayer, sublimely beautiful where conscious power is joined with deep humility and hearted love with glowing faith.

What forceful reasoning that is of the evil spirits in which the noblest attributes of the human mind are debased by exaltation while our sympathy accompanies the wagging of those rebellious tongues ! It is said that Professor Porson narrated an instance of this. Once riding in a stage coach from Banbury to Oxford with one companion, a commercial gentleman, the Professor introduced the subject of Milton and recited portions of "Paradise Lost," concluding with :

" * * * * What though the field be lost ?
All is not lost ; th' unconquerable will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate
And courage never to submit or yield,
And what is else not to be overcome ;
That glory never shall his wrath or might
Extort from me : to bow and sue for grace
With suppliant knee, and deify his power,
Who from the terror of this arm so late
Doubted his empire."

“ Dear me ! ” exclaimed the commercial gentleman, “ Dear me ! I hope he’ll win.”

In the great epic, Milton loved to introduce the names of men and places with which his learning had made him familiar, he does this with exquisite skill ; each is a name renowned in history or romance, in fable or in song ; names which cling to the memory as the perfume to the rose.

The great poet sometimes revelled in terrific imagery. The mind is almost tortured to realize its awful significance. Thus, when the prince of darkness, exulting, tells his compeers of his victory over our first parents and his triumph over the Omnipotent, expecting applause, he is horrified by the hisses encompassing him and in terror beholds the bodies, made in God’s likeness, shrink away from himself and from the fallen angels and their subtlety become enwrapped with the serpent’s slimy form.

Is there anything in literature finer than his lines upon Hypocrisy ?

“ For neither man nor angel can discern
Hypocrisy, the only evil that walks
Invisible, except to God alone,
By his permissive will, through heav’n and earth :
And oft, though wisdom wake, suspicion sleeps
At wisdom’s gate, and to simplicity
Resigns her charge, while goodness thinks no ill
Where no ill seems.”

How beautiful the description of evening and of night : —

“Now came still evening on, and twilight gray
Had in her sober livery all things clad;
Silence accompanied, for beast and bird,
They to their grassy couch, these to their nests,
Were slunk, all but the wakeful nightingale;
She all night long her amorous descant sung;
Silence was pleas’d; now glow’d the firmament
With living sapphires; Hesperus that led
The starry host, rode brightest, till the moon,
Rising in clouded majesty, at length
Apparent queen unveiled her peerless light,
And o’er the dark her silver mantle threw.”

“Was there ever anything so delightful as the music of ‘Paradise Lost’?” wrote the poet Cowper to Unwin.

Melody was a part of Milton’s great inheritance. With him earthly joy became a gladsome song and heavenly praise a quiring symphony. His mind was attuned to lyric rapture; its least expression was in perfect concord, like that of the noble instrument upon which he loved to interpret his highest thought. As you listen to that music the air is tremulous with the majestic diapason, quivers with sympathy, while the soul beats its wings against its mortal cage as if striving to join the glorious harmonies soaring heavenwards.

“Thou hast said much of ‘Paradise Lost,’ ” said the Quaker Elwood to Milton. “What hast thou to say of Paradise Found?” Upon that hint the poet wrote ‘Paradise Regained’; that, with Samson Agonistes, was his last work.

And now Milton was an old, blind man. He had nearly reached the allotted span of human life, the three-

score years and ten. The cause for which he had fought was vanquished and lay prostrate in the dust. The time was out of joint. Renegades flourished, apostacy was honored as a virtue. Genius was obscured by the imps of darkness; the greatest man in all the world was left to die almost destitute, friendless and alone. Yet high thoughts had ever been his best companions and the dear knowledge that his integrity was untarnished, that he had been true to God and to his fellow men yielded comfort inexpressible. Well might he have addressed those about him in the words which he placed between the lips of Samson:

“Happen what may, of me expect to hear
Nothing dishonorable, impure, unworthy
Our God, our law, my nation or myself.”

He died as he had lived. No accusation against Fate, no querulous complaining, no despondent word. Unsullied conscience, Virtue’s champion; pure-eyed Faith, white-handed Hope, like ministering angels, ushered that faithful soul into the bliss of never ending peace.

“Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt,
Dispraise or blame, nothing but well and fair,
And what may quiet us in a death so noble.”



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